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ABSTRACT

The integration of foreign language education and international exchange into a French graduate program in business administration is discussed. The 3-year program results in the equivalent of a master's degree in management. The historical, educational, cultural, and socio-political factors in development of the program are reviewed, and key success factors highlighted, including full integration of languages with business administration instruction, flexible organizational structure, international mission, and institutional commitment to languages and exchanges. Students prepare for a highly-regarded British language examination using an American graduate management textbook. Instruction begins as teacher-centered and progresses to a more conceptually challenging learner-centered approach. In addition to the core program, students are offered more specialized courses in language skills, international culture, and managerial skills. The focal point of the international component is a foreign internship and foreign student program. Cooperative programs have been developed with a number of overseas institutions. Program components specifically designed to integrate language, management, and international elements include a multicultural workshop, native speaker day, and a 2-week exchange program with Boston College (Massachusetts). Regular exposure to foreign language and culture are viewed as essential to oral fluency. (MSE)

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Integrating Foreign Languages and International Exchanges in a Graduate Program of Business

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1.0 Introduction

In this paper we demonstrate how foreign languages and international exchange programs have become an integral part of educating managers at the *École Supérieure de Commerce de Clermont* at Clermont-Ferrand, in central France. After a brief introduction to our business school, we explain the key success factors which have enabled us to integrate languages and exchanges into the business program.

Students are recruited to the Clermont Graduate School of Management after a two year preparation for a competitive entrance examination or after two years' study at university. The average age is 20 and students study for three years at the school. The first year is considered to be equivalent to the final year of undergraduate study in the U.S., and the second and third years correspond to an MBA program. There is, however, one notable difference: the curriculum includes 20% compulsory foreign language study.

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2. Key Success Factors - External

What, then, are the key success factors which have contributed to fully integrating the language component into the management program? In fact, they stem from a complex interaction of external and internal dimensions. The external factors can be summarised briefly as follows:

Historical

Educational

Cultural

Socio-Political

2.1 Historical

The school, founded in 1919, is one of the older *Grandes Ecoles* in the *Ecole Supérieure de Commerce* network and belongs to the 25 institutions in France that are accredited by the *Chapitre* (equivalent to the AACSB). Historically, the *Grandes Ecoles* in France were set up in reaction to the slow moving, bureaucratic universities which were unable to provide the management education for the newly emerging needs of companies and organizations. An integral element in the new business schools was foreign language study. Educating business leaders has always meant giving a broad, generalist training not only in the sciences and technically applicable subjects, but also in the humanities.

2.2 Educational

The wider educational context is important for understanding the role given to languages in management education. All pupils in France learn at least one foreign language, usually English, for a minimum of four years. Many study a second or third language, and Latin is still respected in the curriculum. In secondary school, all students must offer at least one foreign language to pass the *Baccalauréat* examination, and all programs in higher education include a compulsory language component. More specifically, as regards the French *Grandes Ecoles* system of business education, a rigorous entrance exam with strong language coefficients ensures that students admitted have already acquired a certain degree of fluency in

at least two foreign languages. Further pressure to maintain and improve their level is applied throughout the student's academic career. All students are required to pass the Comprehensive Leaving Examination in two foreign languages in order to graduate. There is indeed an underlying assumption that an educated citizen must have some linguistic competence.

2.3 Cultural

The broader cultural environment has encouraged and reinforced the need for language learning. French speakers cannot allow themselves the luxury of a monolingual existence. Of course, English is the dominant business language. However, geographical proximity and historical links have also compelled Europeans to be more active and more positive about communicating in a foreign tongue other than English.

2.4 Socio-Political

In Europe, the Commission of the European Communities has played a significant role in setting the context for language learning. Programmes such as ERASMUS, COMETT, LINGUA and TEMPUS can only function successfully if languages are treated seriously as a compulsory element of higher education. /1/. Indeed, in the first phase of the ERASMUS program, business studies took the lion's share (25%) of the funding for exchange programs. A further impetus for language learning came from the various preparations for the Single European Market in 1993, and this interest has been extended to Eastern Europe and the new linguistic challenges.

3. Key Success Factors - Internal

The external environment has certainly been propitious for foreign language study in our business school, but this favorable situation can only be fully exploited through careful management of internal dimensions. The following appear as key elements:

A Fully Integrated Language Department

A Flexible Organizational Structure

An International Culture

An Institutional Commitment to Languages and Exchanges

3.1 A fully Integrated Language Department

Foreign languages were an institutional priority from the beginning at the Clermont Graduate School of Management. Language professors were appointed when the school was founded and they have always shared the same status as professors of Marketing or Finance. More precisely, as is the case with every member of faculty, language professors participate in elaborating overall school strategy and have a vote in determining school policy. In such a structure, the gap that may exist in some universities between the language and the business faculty has simply never existed.

3.2 A Flexible Organizational Structure

The school is run by an independent Board of Administration including the Regional Chamber of Commerce and representatives from local industry. The smaller and more nimble managerial-like structure in the school has enabled it to be highly flexible and proactive in revamping curriculum and course design, as well as in entertaining closer links to the business community of the region, reacting more quickly to their needs, setting up internships early on, integrating business people into the part-time faculty, setting up seminars and guest lectures and, in many cases, elaborating a curriculum in collaboration with businesses from the region.

Within the flexible institutional framework, the Languages and International Relations Department plays a key role. In addition to setting up language programs for the three-year Masters in Business, for the Post-graduate programs, for the Adult Education Program, and for tailor-made, in-company language training programs, the "lean and mean" Language and International Relations Department also interfaces: with students preparing for, and returning from, studies and internships abroad; with foreign students whose individual needs are even more diverse than their nationalities; with more than 50 part-time, native-speaker, foreign language teachers; with some 30 foreign institutions of higher learning; finally, it interfaces with the five major business departments and the administration of the Clermont Graduate

School itself. Being at the crossroads of so many different interest groups, the department is continuously breaking down internal organizational barriers, continuously managing change, continuously appraising the culture of the situation, or seizing the moment, as it were.

3.3 An International Culture

The current objectives behind the development of international exchanges at the school must be seen within the overall strategy as defined by the incoming director in 1978. At the time, the school was a relatively small, provincial business school recruiting only from the Auvergne region. The new direction aimed at placing the institution amongst the leading *Grandes Ecoles de Gestion* in France, by developing, amongst other things, a strong international dimension.

An important element in implementing the new strategy was the creation of an international culture within the business school itself. This involved developing links with foreign universities to enable our students to study abroad and to welcome foreign students to our campus. At the same time, business professors of many nationalities were recruited - more than 25% of the full-time faculty - as well as a strong team of native language speakers. In 1991, the ERASMUS program awarded the Clermont Graduate School of Management first prize for having the most comprehensive business exchange program in the E.E.C. And more recently, the French journal Le Monde de L'Education ranked the school fifth out of 44 graduate business programs./2/.

Developing international relations stemmed from a deep conviction in the belief that experience abroad was an essential component in educating future managers. Today, managers must be able to adapt quickly to different teams, different products, and different cultures in a constantly changing competitive environment. For our students, 'international' means more than 'mobility', or 'traveling', or 'stays and studies abroad'. It is rather the educational experience which results from being confronted with a different culture, a different way of acting, of thinking, and of speaking. If exchanges undeniably provide students with a definite competitive advantage from a professional point of view, they also bring the student an extremely enriching experience from a personal point of view. The underlying philosophy of

exchange programs remains constant: awareness of, and exposure to, different cultures leads to producing better managers, better international relations and better global citizenship.

The ability to handle cultural diversity in the workplace does not necessarily have the same implications in a European context as it might in the United States. Being able to do business effectively in a European context has required managers to confront head on the harsh reality of the language barrier, a barrier that slows down and even handicaps effective communication, and business. An increasingly integrated European market has literally forced managers, as well as business schools who train them, to deal with the language problem early on. From the Common Market to the EEC to Maastricht and the European Union, dealing with cultural diversity has been a requirement for survival.

3.4 An Institutional Commitment to Languages and Exchanges

The school's longstanding commitment to languages and international exchanges is further highlighted by the wide range of courses offered and the academic recognition granted to language study. In order to graduate, the student is required to achieve a high degree of fluency in English and in a second language usually German or Spanish. Nevertheless, Arabic, Chinese, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese or Russian are becoming increasingly popular. Students are also encouraged to study a third language, and more of them are doing so. The school proposes Hebrew, Dutch, and Serbo-Croat through an agreement signed with the University of Clermont. Many students prepare the well-known international examinations such as the British, German, and Spanish Chamber of Commerce Exams, or the University of Cambridge First Certificate, Advanced and Proficiency Exams. Students planning to pursue an MBA in the United States prepare for GMAT and TOEFL Examinations. In today's increasingly competitive job markets, students consider a 'rare' or a 'third' language or an international examination as extremely advantageous to include in their resumé.

More than half of the students continue to improve their language skills by studying abroad, many of them obtaining Masters degrees from partner institutions in North America or in Europe. All students have to complete a two-month internship in a foreign country by the end of their second year.

4. The Language Component

Achieving an integrated curriculum involves making the language program more business oriented while at the same time making the business program more language oriented, wherever possible. At our school considerable efforts have been directed towards these objectives and the main achievements are described in the following sections.

4.1 Program design and content

One fundamental principle that we adhere to in course design is to open up the classroom as much as possible to the outside world. Giving students a concrete objective to strive for outside the classroom can seriously enhance their motivation. The British Chamber of Commerce Exam, for example, a national examination, forms an integral part of the first year common core program in English. The exam evaluates speaking, listening, letterwriting and translating skills in a broad spectrum of business related themes; it is highly regarded in the French business community. For this very reason, many students choose to sit for the examination, thus greatly sharpening their interest in classroom activities. Students prepare for the exam using an American textbook which provides a dynamic introduction to the contemporary business world.^{/3/} The fact that the book is used by their student counterparts on MBA Programs in American universities imparts additional legitimacy to the course, further reinforcing their motivation to learn.

Given the traditional and very rigorous academic background of the majority of the students ^{/4/}, using as a starting point the BCC Exam interactively with an American MBA textbook makes sound pedagogical sense. Nevertheless, the teaching methods and the classroom activities evolve from a more directive, teacher-centered approach at the beginning of the course, to a more open-ended, interactive, learner-centered approach as the course progresses. The students start off on familiar territory and are gradually brought to a more conceptually challenging, exciting form of interactive learning. The process is by no means abrupt. Neither is the objective to change the approach as much as it is to expand the different types of approaches, methods and activities used in the classroom

As a result, in the second year common core program, we deploy a much wider range of learning activities. In elaborating this program, we have attempted to follow a key principle that Steven Krashen, amongst others, has emphasized: "...focus on subject matter - connected subject matter - promotes language acquisition." /5/. Hence, the choice of content can help to transform the learning of a foreign language from drudgery into an interesting, self-appropriated, and effective means of communication. The second year program, entitled 'International Business', illustrates this very point. The course content is constructed against the backdrop of the BBC Video Series Bid for Power /6/. Current, relevant themes such as the "Legal, Political, and Economic Environments Facing Business"; or "Regional Economic Integration" or "The Human and Cultural Environments Facing Business" /7/, are woven into the substantial number of realistic settings of the film. Classroom activities used to exploit the themes are largely interactive and communicative. Group work, negotiating exercises, and role playing are encouraged through an abundance of primary source materials including cross-readings of current newspaper articles, international satellite radio broadcasts, and appropriate TV documentaries. The future manager finds himself in a position wherein he is required to react.

D.A. Wilkins explains: "...it is our aim for language learners that they should be able to produce and receive communication in the language, and it would be a major contribution to language learning if we could tap or stimulate the pupil's interest in the communicative activity itself so that in their desire for successful communication they became largely unaware of the linguistic forms that are being used." /8/. These ideas have guided us in program selection and design and help us make language learning a more rewarding experience for our students.

In this respect, language learning in the broadest sense, i.e. acquiring communicative competence, can play a pivotal role in educating tomorrow's managers. As rigidly structured, vertical layers of hierarchy are being flattened out in company restructurings, there is a strong likelihood that teams of people will be working together horizontally across departments, across disciplines and across cultures. Communication skills, both oral and written, will play a key role in the training; and foreign language learning in and of itself is well placed to fill that role.

4.2 The Modular System

With the conviction that managers will need an ever wider range of skills and a more broadly based cultural background, modules are offered in addition to the common core program; they are broken down into three categories that correspond to the broadening of perspectives we seek to encourage.

Under Language Skills, the first category, students may choose to prepare any of the previously mentioned international examinations. Other language modules include "Pronunciation" (reserved for students with particular problems in this area); a module specializing in translation and simultaneous interpretation skills; and "Listen & Talk", (before class, students listen to recordings of authentic radio broadcasts and prepare discussions for class).

Under International Culture, the second category, "American Economic Issues" and "The British Economic Environment" are proposed. Area studies covered include: "Australia", "The Former Soviet Bloc Countries" and "Nations of the Pacific Rim". In the "International Herald Tribune" or the "Financial Times" module, students, who take out a one-day-a-week subscription to the paper, compare journalistic reporting (linguistic, structural and geopolitical elements) with the French newspaper of their choice. Becoming an active newspaper reader not only gives the future manager practice in a key language skill, but also opens up new cultural perspectives. An overview of science and technology is presented in The Carsat Crisis, a thirteen week BBC video series./9/. In this module, future managers become more aware of the complicated and complex problems engineers are facing in firms today. Other modules include "Twentieth Century Anglo-Saxon Literature", "Readings from the Harvard Business Review", and "Video News" (an analysis and discussion of British and American television programs).

Under Managerial Skills, the final category, students may select "Business Case Studies", "Anglo-Saxon Finance and Accounting", "Managerial Economics", "Marketing Management", or "Organizational Behavior". The aim of these specialized modules is not to teach the contents, but rather to exploit the context to render students more proficient in

managing the terminology and the idioms necessary for effective communication in the particular business area. The management context is the backcloth for linguistic practice. At the same time, students are exposed to authentic materials through the management textbooks, videos, satellite radio broadcasts and up-to-date newspaper articles. In these modules, the students are thus confronted with substantial differences in the pedagogical approach and even in the contents of the subject taught. Students thus develop a heightened awareness of how greatly business customs and practices can differ from one culture to another. The underlying leitmotiv is, as in all our courses, innovative language learning through diversity.

4.3 The International Component

The 'wildcard' behind the program is, of course, the International component. To ensure success, both the language teaching and the international experiences are woven into the core curriculum. Languages and study abroad are not an added extra. They are integral elements of a complex curriculum and they are given respect along with the standard management subjects such as Marketing, Finance, Accounting, Human Resources. All students must spend a minimum of two months abroad, completing either company internships or approved individual projects which lead to enhanced insight and understanding of another culture. However, more than half the students spend between six and twelve months in a foreign university or company.

Preparation for these new experiences is built into the language learning curriculum. Students going to the United States, for example, must follow specialized electives in English in Anglo-Saxon Finance and Accounting, and a cultural module called "America". Naturally, the learners are highly motivated. Not only are they improving their linguistic skills and knowledge of a foreign culture, more importantly they are ensuring that the likelihood that they may encounter 'culture shock' is minimised. In addition, through formal and informal contacts, the students leaving meet with those who have returned and also with foreign students from the same foreign campus. An intricate web of cross-fertilization is formed. The conditions for success can be planned and organised, but measuring the outcome remains difficult. What is sure, however, is that the context we aim to create leads to sustained and rich

experiences both on our campus and abroad when the very same students meet again in a new environment. Our students abroad are also preparing the future foreign students for their studies in Clermont. As the years move on, extensive networks emerge between citizens. A broader educational, humanistic, objective is attained.

Students are given the opportunity to study abroad for the second semester, second year. Their academic achievements are fully recognised and count towards their final degree. The three year program is extended to four when students opt to study abroad for one full year between their second and third year. In Europe, the E.U. has been promoting the ECU, a common European currency. But Brussels has also been promoting a common European degree, the European Master in Business Sciences (EMBS). Together with five institutions in France, Germany and Britain we have set up this new Brussels supported degree, a pioneering model for future developments within the Community. Students must spend one year of their four-year program in a partner institution, following a recognised program and successfully completing the required examinations, both at home and abroad.

In the United States students are admitted into second year MBA/MS classes in several prestigious universities, including Boston College, Cornell, Kansas, Louisiana State, Ohio, Oregon and South Carolina. After obtaining the MBA/MS the students return to complete their French degree in Clermont. This is a fundamental aspect of our philosophy. These returning students enrich the learning environment on our campus.

Returning students are expected to contribute positively to the academic and organizational development of the school. Young MBA graduates bring fresh, innovative ideas into the language classroom. Using new pedagogical approaches to business subjects, these final-year students actually teach first and second-year classes under the language instructor's supervision. In other cases, returning students work with business faculty in translating or developing teaching materials. Under faculty guidance, some are able to lecture about specific business topics they have studied abroad. The key here is the cross-fertilization of ideas and experiences.

Foreign students, too, are integrated into the business and language curriculum. In the Marketing or Finance classes they bring new perspectives, new approaches. They challenge

our culture and our values, and hence they learn from each other and they educate our students and professors! The foreign students also participate in language classes - languages which may be foreign to them.

Furthermore, they are integrated into the interdisciplinary company start-up project. Students in their first year are organised into small groups to work on a project involving the setting up of a company. Unlike traditional MBA programs which offer Small Business Management as final year electives, our students are compelled from the day they arrive at the school to grapple with the problems involved in developing business ideas, investigating the project feasibility, preparing a business plan, obtaining finance etc. In 'learning by doing' the students become active learners. They need to attend the Marketing class in order to advance in their project. A substantial language component is woven into the interdisciplinary project: students are given lectures by foreign businessmen, workshops are held in the foreign language, and finally, all written projects must be submitted with an executive summary in English or in another foreign language.

5. Integrated Learning Activities

With a view to integrating the language, international and management components, several pedagogical tools have been particularly useful. They include:

The Multicultural Workshop

Native Speaker Day

The 'Off-shore' Elective

5.1 The Multicultural Workshop

Three-on-one, half-hour tutorials can play a strategic role in achieving the overall objectives of the program. To cement a closer, more intimate and workable pedagogical relationship between the student and the teacher, to field problem areas with individual students, as well as to make adjustments to the content and emphasis of the program, the "tutorial" can play a critical role especially when timed early on in the semester.

With challenging reading material as content, the tutorial should enable the teacher to quickly identify the student's weaknesses and strengths in oral expression. Furthermore, the teacher should be able to assess the student's overall ability to analyze, to summarize, and to effectively present and argue the material in a small group situation. Finally, the tutorial provides a context in which to obtain substantially more personal feedback from each individual student: valuable feedback regarding the content, organisation, rhythm, level etc. of the course.

When the occasion arises, managers taking advanced language courses in companies, professors from different business departments, and administrators from the school are integrated into the tutorials along with students and professors from our partner institutions abroad./10/. The tutorial is literally transformed into a multicultural workshop: a crossroads for exchanging ideas from different professional backgrounds, different academic disciplines and different countries.

5.2 Native Speaker Day

Students coming from abroad to study for a semester or a full year are scheduled for task-oriented interviews with a small number of French students. Integrating foreign students into a small, tightly-knit class (where social 'groupings' or 'clics' have already long been formed) is no small matter. Even when dealing with extremely mature adults, the 'birds of a feather' adage can be a tempting solution for socializing, let alone for students in a completely unfamiliar social and cultural setting. One of the main objectives of Native Speaker Day is thus to start breaking down those barriers early on in the semester, right inside the classroom. On the one hand, both home students and foreign students are assigned the task of getting as much practical information as possible about their respective institutions: How many classes per day are attended? What kind of exams, reports, etc. are expected? What types of students attend? Can you describe campus facilities, extra-curricular activities, student lodgings, etc.? In addition, students are also asked to find out as much as possible about the student's personal life: academic cursus, job experience, family background, career objectives, personal perceptions and/or opinions regarding current issues. As an assignment, students must submit

a two page synopsis of the interview. Native Speaker Day provides a practical, concrete classroom experience which serves to crystalize authentic and cross-cultural communication. Students who otherwise would not have taken the initiative are given an ideal, formal context in which to get to know one another. The 'locals' (i.e. First Year French students) are given a first hand account on home ground of the very institution they may elect to attend the following year.

5.3 The 'Off-shore' Elective

A further example of integrated activities for home and foreign students is our two week-long, intensive, Off-shore elective. Every year we organize a program in English for MBA students from Boston College to learn about business in Europe, with particular emphasis given to our region, the Auvergne. Boston College runs a similar program for our students who learn about business in the greater Boston area. The students must submit a report on an industrial sector of their choice in the region. Both the American and French students obtain credit toward their respective degrees.

Social integration is one of the key, 'hidden' components of the elective. Students in the host institution are personally responsible for accommodating the guests. Under the circumstances, accommodations may indeed be somewhat make-shift, but the extremely enriching experience of LIVING and WORKING ABROAD with a foreign student counterpart in HIS/HER OWN ENVIRONMENT is invaluable.

6. Concluding remarks

These are just some of the learning activities we involve our students in. When foreign students are also included, issues such as team work, leadership, motivation, commitment, and many more, are confronted in a real multicultural learning environment in a multinational classroom. It is precisely this environment that our students are facing more and more when they graduate. An increasing number of European firms employ managers from various countries, and thus the education we give them contributes to more successful multicultural co-operation. Languages are a major element in this education.

The improvement or, at the very least, the maintenance of oral fluency in a foreign language requires regular, constant, and challenging exposure. Most experts on the subject will agree, language learning may be seen as analogous to learning how to dance, to play the piano, or to run the 100 yard-dash. Regular, systematic exposure is an undeniable element of success. Some schools are grouping together the language requirements into relatively short intensive 'seminars', leaving long periods of time when the student has no contact whatsoever with the language. Other schools have adopted a policy whereby, if the student can demonstrate a sufficiently high level before even entering the establishment (for instance, a TOEFL score of 550), then he/she will have the language requirement 'waived'. Such a policy neglects to see language learning as a 'process': the ability to communicate in a foreign language cannot under any circumstances be viewed as knowledge which can be acquired 'once and for all'. On the contrary, given our commitment to languages, language learning must be viewed as a continuing process which requires a personal and affective dedication, if it is to succeed.

Notes

/1/ European Commission. Higher Education in the European Community. (Brussels: 1991) V.

/2/ Le Monde de l'Education November 1993: 72

/3/ Ricky W. Griffin and Ronald J. Ebert. Business. 3rd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1993).

/4/ Most of the students come from the *classes préparatoires*, a rigorous and very competitive liberal arts preparatory program which includes eight hours per week of grammar-translation based instruction in two foreign languages.

/5/ Linda Lonon Blanton, "A holistic approach to college ESL: integrating language and content," English Language Teaching Journal 46/3 (1992) 288.

/6/ Bid for Power, BBC Publications London, 1983. This video series deals with high-tech European and American firms forming a consortium to compete with a Japanese multinational for a major contract in a developing country.

/7/ John D. Daniels and Lee H. Radebaugh. International Business 6th ed. (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison Wesley, 1992).

/8/ D.A. Wilkins. Second Language Learning and Teaching (London: Edward Arnold, 1974) 84.

/9/ The Carsat Crisis, BBC Publications London, 1988

/10/ Multicultural workshops were organised at the inauguration ceremonies of the school's new building in March 1992 and at the 75th Anniversary of the school in March 1994.